Conflict and Security
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Abstract

Conflict and security although related, imply different domains. Conflict has long been a pre-occupation of anthropology. Underlying assumptions about how best to understand conflict have shifted over the years, but it is probably fair to say that anthropologists have been at the forefront of challenging accepted wisdom about meanings and practices associated with conflict since its earliest days. Security, on the other hand, is a more recent interest within anthropology. Security studies really grew as a distinct field of study in the aftermath of 11 September, 2001. It has been dominated by International Relations (IR) and political science, but anthropology has a long history of studying social institutions that form part of the security apparatus. In many respects, anthropology, although not primarily concerned with state institutions is ideally suited to understand the interplay between economic, political, historical and cultural forces shaping the experiences and structure of security and conflict.

Development, Conflict and Security

Development projects have always had to consider the safety of implementation. In the colonial era, development was part of the repertoire of activities that might extend overt control of the colonial regime through the expansion of canals, rail lines, roads or schools. Since the extension of European colonial control was not, historically, universally welcomed by all concerned parties, such projects were carried out with security clearly in mind. In the post colonial era, overt political dominance is not normally identified as an aim of development projects, but there can be resistance to externally funded interventions for a variety of reasons. Increasingly, certain parts of the world have found themselves in long term conflicts with no clear pathways towards peaceful resolution. Development within conflict zones has, sadly, become a reality for many. The choice of abandoning efforts to improve people's livelihoods and wellbeing is never a comfortable one and thus far, has only been made in a handful of cases by the major international development organizations. Rather than leaving those areas without development, however, this can result in opening the field to different sorts of development, usually non European or North American and with noticeably different prioritization of individual rights. The ways in which anthropologists have theorized both conflict and security may play an important role in how development practitioners approach specific conflict zones around the world. Viewing conflict and security phenomena systemically, from local to global levels, helps to design and implement interventions that are potentially more effective in achieving their stated aims.

The Anthropology of Conflict

One of the pioneers of anthropology, Sir Henry Maine, provided some of the earliest examples of what might be understood as conflict anthropology. Using a combination of historical data, largely from ancient Rome, and contemporary missionary and traveller accounts, Maine (1861) produced an argument that was very much of its time. Maine paved the way for the diverse ways in which anthropologists study conflict and the idea that conflict offers a valuable entry point into key aspects of culture and social organization. Malinowski's (1926) adopted a generous boundary of what constitutes the law which suited the holistic aspirations of his generation. Jurist-anthropology teams, on the other hand, were more comfortable appropriating the case study method from Anglo-American legal traditions

(Llewellyn & Hoebel 1941). Using conflict as a device to study the boundaries of social norms has proven remarkably useful, even for those not interested in conflict *per se*. Evans-Pritchard, the quintessential structural functionalist in many ways, dedicated considerable attention to the tensions inherent in the role of the Nuer Leopard Skin Chief; these men had to act as mediator and peace restorer in a context in which they had no recognized authority over anyone outside of their own lineage and homestead (1940). The search for equilibrium models of society was resoundingly challenged by the Manchester School's explicit focus on conflict not as pathology, but as systemic. Researchers based at the University of Manchester, working in urban Sub Saharan African contexts. found they could not adopt the orderly structural functionalist model that dominated anthropology before them. Turner (1958) offered one of the most useful examples of the ways in which social expectations could be bent and 'broken' in response to the specific circumstances of individuals and groups. His work sought to understand how the rules of a particular society might be contingent on the practical demands of securing a sustainable living. Such conditions always have the potential to both trigger and mitigate conflict. Gluckman published widely on the role of conflict in society and the extent to which this formed an integral aspect of social relations (see especially Gluckman 1955). The development of transactionalism within anthropology led to an explosion of rich analyses of conflict. Since transactionalism shifts the emphasis of analysis from society to transactions between individual members of society, it became not only conceptually more feasible to describe and analyse conflict, but also far more likely. The early anthropology of Pakistan, for example, is dominated by conflict management processes among both men and women (Eglar 1960; Barth 1959). Bailey was concerned with similar processes of systemically triggered and managed conflict in India (Bailey 1969). Regardless of the theoretical tradition, however, everywhere that anthropologists have carried out research, they have eventually dedicated considerable time and energy to understanding how the people with whom they work manage conflict. The conclusions they draw from such studies have varied widely, of course. Chagnon (1983), for example, developed ambitious Hobbesian arguments about human nature and the inherent violence and aggression of the human species, much to the irritation of others, including, apparently Margaret Mead, who had built her reputation arguing precisely the opposite a generation earlier [1928].
The Africanists, in particular, viewed conflict as integral to a more complex systems understanding of societies (Gluckman 1955, Gulliver 1973, Bohannan 1957). The ethnographic evidence seemed to suggest that societies were neither static nor particularly harmonious. Harmony, if such a thing exists for societies, was the consequence of effective mechanisms for dealing with conflict. Perhaps more provocatively, they suggested that conflict was both productive and destructive. In other words, within any given society, there will be people who intentionally trigger conflict to achieve their goals. Those same people may be crucial to resolving conflict in other circumstances. This generation of novel anthropologists brought anthropology to the uncomfortable view that conflict could not, *a priori,* be categorized as pathological. The anthropology of conflict (which draws from political and legal anthropology as well as other sub-specialisms such as the anthropology of kinship or religion), has consequently veered into positions that occasionally seem to ignore ethnocentric assumptions about “good” or “bad” conflict.

In the 1960s, anthropologists faced a well established body of anecdotal evidence about Melanesia, produced by missionaries and early traders about chronic warfare, that often included shocking tales of barbaric brutality like cannibalism. This provided an opportunity for new theoretical approaches that were more boldly and openly Marxist than either British or American anthropologists could have managed in the 1940s and 1950s. Conflicts were placed in grand schemes and understood as part of complex systems. Rappaport used ecology to explain the complex interactions between constituent elements within systems. The explicit inclusion of environmental variables as active participants in

human cultural and social production allowed conflict to be studied in more holistic ways. Worsley, working comparatively across different regions of the world, also attempted to understand conflict systemically but cast the horizon slightly differently than identifiable ecosystems. Along with Wallerstein and Frank, he was instrumental in logically connecting seemingly remote economic points around the globe both geographically and historically. Worsley understood nationalist movements within their historical post-colonial contexts. While such analyses were to become common in subsequent generations, his contribution of developing a global, systemic and historical framework to understand localized conflicts should not be underestimated. The implications arising from these types of studies of conflict are far reaching and sobering. While it remains possible to isolate culture and study the details of specific cases firmly situated within cultural contexts, new possibilities for expanding the boundaries through time, social relations and geography became possible. French anthropologists were far less shy about blatantly imposing Marxist theoretical models on their ethnographic data. Godelier (1986), another Melanesianist, understood the chronic warfare of the Baruya in very unambiguously Marxist terms driven by a detailed analysis of the systems of production. The extraordinary conflict between genders and generations among this Baruya group in the Highlands of Papua New Guinea, framed in Godelier's terms, could be understood in relation to the modes of production, which seemed somehow to make the stark violence slightly more comprehensible, if no less upsetting.

Following these exciting radical shifts in how anthropologists produced their ethnographic accounts and the theoretical models they employed to make sense of data, anthropology has followed a path of increasing theoretical fragmentation. Conflict, however, has remained a major source of interest, despite the persistent diversity in approaches even within conflict studies. Comaroff and Roberts (1981), for example, have built on the tradition originally inspired by Malinwski and Bohannan in understanding conflict within society as part of wider processes. They demonstrate the inadequacies of relying on formal conflict resolution institutions and rules in isolation. While it is possible to produce coherent narratives around specific conflict case studies, in which it would appear that the outcomes were largely predictable through thorough understanding of the relevant rules, Comaroff and Roberts provide multiple ethnographic cases in which the social cultural context in which the conflict arose could dramatically alter the outcomes. In rural Punjab, for example, there are clear rules about how to resolve conflict, but by themselves they tell one little about how particular conflicts may play out. A Punjabi proverb, oft repeated both seriously and in jest in Punjab, for example, says that all conflicts are about *zan, zar* and *zameen* (women, gold/money, and land). These three issues probably do account for the vast majority of formally adjudicated conflicts, but they certainly do not include all occasions when individuals might commit acts of violence against one another, and certainly do not include all of the stated rationales that individuals use when justifying their acts of violence against others (Lyon 2004). The proverb, coupled with the formal adjudication rules in both Islamic or Shari'a as well as the Pakistani state courts, hints at something far more complicated and interesting about conflict. What is considered a serious transgression, particularly those worthy of triggering violent actions, are not universal despite some commonalities that may at first appear obvious to outside observers. Conflicts, like the people engaged in them, are firmly rooted in specific historical and cultural contexts. This is arguably one of the areas in which anthropology has had, and continues to have, important contributions to make.

The Anthropology of Security

The anthropology of security, in contrast, does not necessarily build explicitly on the deep tradition of legal anthropology or more generally of the ways in which anthropologists have historically studied conflict. In part this is because the most high profile post 9/11 conflicts affecting many research sites within anthropology have far more directly involved

states. While anthropology has come a very long way from the days of focussing exclusively and myopically on a “tribe” or a “village”, the methodological stock in trade of the discipline, participant observation, has not always been the most effective way of producing data on states. Ethnographic accounts of state institutions were produced prior to the 1990s, but they clearly require slightly different methodological and theoretical tools. Foucault’s classic work on the ways in which institutions, particularly state institutions, have developed over time to shape and control the body has been an important theme throughout the anthropology of security. Foucault argued that the notion of docility, in reference to the body, brings together the analyzable and manipulable body. The 'docile' body, therefore, 'may be subjected, used, transformed and improved' (Foucault 1977: 136). Such an analysis is potentially useful not only for understanding the development of legal and penal institutions, as Foucault demonstrated, but also more generally for the ways in which citizenry is constructed and controlled. The securitization of the mundane, routine environment may consequently be understood within this Foucauldian theoretical framework as a continuation of ongoing processes that shape, to a very real extent, what it means to be and have a body in a context. In turn, this has powerful implications for the the kinds of citizenship (in relation to the state) and personhood (in relation to communities) are possible or impossible. To be sure, this is not the only way to understand the growth of the security apparatuses around the world, but it seems relatively straightforward to suggest that such apparatuses have not arisen in consistent or logical manners derived from the evidence of the probability or severity of potential threats. Were that to be the case, changing sea temperatures, malaria parasites and gastrointestinal disorders among children might generate considerably more government initiatives than slick propagandists such as Islamic State or al Qaeda, who have to date, not even come close to the devastation and death tolls inflicted by the former three killers.

Following the 9/11 attacks on the World Trade Center and the Pentagon, there was an acceleration of the *in*securitization that had arguably been receding in preceding decades, or at least that is how the security shift is usually framed within security studies and political science. Goldstein challenges this dominant narrative in arguing that security discourses offered a way of dealing with the "crises and contradictions of neoliberalism" through the power of fear (2010: 487). Goldstein has become one of the leading proponents of an anthropology of security and makes a compelling case that following the attacks of 9/11 the world entered a kind of “security moment” in which governments expanded their powers of surveillance and control through an enhanced promotion of the threats of what is characterized as new forms of violence, especially terrorism.

Rather than marking the beginning of a new world order, then, the beginning of global War on Terror may be understood as the addition of a powerful new set of discursive tools in neoliberal state construction and governmentality. This concerns states as well as local communities and individuals. Security becomes a necessary concern for everyone regardless of the realistic probabilities of current threats. We argue here that this concern with security has become pervasive across large parts, if not all, of South Asia. This is not to deny that there are threats of politicized and other types of criminal violence confronting ordinary people across the Indian Sub-Continent, however, these are perhaps not sufficient to explain the levels of material and symbolic pre-occupation and investment in security structures found even in relatively peaceful areas. If instead, we understand the development of security as a tool not only for state construction and governmentality, but also of community, then both the increased surveillance on the part of the state as well as the adoption of similar strategies at local community levels makes sense.

The specific forms of insecuritization that take place around the world are intimately connected to the growing pervasiveness of information technologies. Biometric security software allows security apparatuses to cope with, or at least appear to cope with, big data generated from crowds and through digital eavesdropping programs that were greatly

expanded in the 21st century. In part, the illusion that this was feasible and possibly even easy, was the result of the explosion of social media like Facebook and Twitter. Individuals around the world were volunteering information about themselves and their closest acquaintances that could be sorted and analyzed by software that could spot anomalies that could then be investigated in more traditional ways. In addition, the growth of internet search engines to perform rudimentary daily tasks and the opportunity to track consumer habits through loyalty schemes and credit card records, has resulted in huge data sets that reveal normative behavioral profiles and allow security personnel to hone in on outliers. The software generates normative behaviors through data mining; while this is neither good nor bad in and of itself, it raises a number of questions about groups and individuals who fall outside the generated norms (Maguire 2014). Reliance on behavior assessing software has not been uniform throughout the world, nevertheless, there have been attempts to monitor and control bodies more closely everywhere.

While Foucault's notions of biopolitics and governmentality seem to have dominated aspects of a critical anthropology of security, other anthropological traditions have found their way into explicit studies of security threats. Atran stands out as one of the more prolific advocates for an engaged anthropology that is grounded in empirical data. He has used social networks analysis to try and help the American government, among others, to understand the nature of Muslim groups who resort to violence to achieve their political aims (e.g his briefing slides to the National Security Council and the White House on the Madrid bombers 2006). Perhaps more controversially, some anthropologists have agreed to work closely with military units, providing expert cultural knowledge on the ground in conflict zones (see Howe 2011 on the Human Terrain System). Moos (2005), argued that while there is arguably greater moral ambiguity in 21st century conflicts than some earlier ones, anthropological training for intelligence and military personnel can make the state's responses to contemporary asymmetrical warfare more effective. He was one of the principle people behind the Pat Roberts Intelligence Scholars Program (PRISP), which provides substantial scholarship funding for students taking linguistic and social science courses that enhance their ability to serve American intelligence services after graduation (Moos 2005). Some applied anthropologists, including Moos, have been critical of what they argue is politically short sighted naivety exhibited by a number of anthropologists who have followed more the tradition of Boas; Boas criticized a group of anthropologists in an open letter to *The Nation* who had spied on behalf of the US government while carrying out anthropological fieldwork. He argued, as many 21st century anthropologists have argued, that overly close collaboration with military or intelligence agencies, especially when that collaboration is covert, endangers the life of all anthropologists in the field.

The problems with an anthropology of security are not restricted to the ethics of collaboration or participation. Operationally, there are serious challenges to carrying out the sorts of long term fieldwork that has characterized cultural and social anthropology for the better part of a century. Werbner (2010) asks whether the sorts of data required by intelligence services are in fact conceptually outside the scope of anthropology. 21st century insurgencies intentionally disrupt part of the very things anthropologists routinely seek: patterns, rituals and mundane daily habits. Anthropological methods have not historically been rapid. Development anthropologists have developed a number of data production techniques for accelerating the acquisition of data, but even these are often predicated on significant prior experience and knowledge of a region. Unlike journalists, Werbner argues, anthropologists are not natural headline grabbers and producers. They strive for methodical holism which, one could argue, may be the antithesis of what many security apparatus personnel think they need.

Future Directions for Conflict and Security

Security issues are set to remain central in many countries around the world. Anthropologists who deal with certain regions of the world are regularly confronted with the need to protect their independence from security forces while relying on them for their safety. In many cases, conflicts become so disruptive that the resultant rates of change demand profound paradigmatic departures from the theoretical and methodological tools familiar to cultural anthropologists. This has already forced anthropologists to modify their behaviors in the field and has resulted in a return to a modified form of armchair anthropology for some. For others, severe conflict has triggered a shift towards studying diaspora, refugees or beginning afresh with unfamiliar populations. Anthropologists who do persist in engaging with fieldwork in conflict zones face ever greater institutional restrictions. Visa requirements typically become more onerous during hot conflicts and the costs of arranging appropriate insurance rise. Universities in countries involved remotely in asymmetrical wars around the world, like the United States and the United Kingdom, face challenges to their independence as funding is increasingly linked to potential impacts on societies. This has a number of worrying implications for academic engagement with security agencies. Whereas mid 20th century anthropologists were relatively free to study conflict as detached observers of participants who frequently had little interest in using the observer to effect the outcome of the conflict, 21st century states actively want national social scientists to assist in a growing number of ways in their conflicts. The UK has seen a steady creep of monitoring expectations imposed on academic staff, particularly in relation to overseas students. Universities who fail yo satisfy government guidelines for active monitoring and reporting on foreign students risk losing their status as visa eligible higher education institutions. Across the world states appear to have adopted ever more Manichean logics to academic activities. More authoritarian regimes, like Uzbekistan, restrict outright the teaching of disciplines perceived to be hostile to the authority of the state. Some regimes are more subtle in their attempts to manipulate academia, such as Japan, where funding for social sciences has been diverted to disciplines whose utility is more immediately recognised by the ruling party. In the US, the traditional funding routes for social science postgraduate studies have been steadily eroded and the rise of student monitors in lectures has effectively stifled free and open debate on security matters in at least some universities.

Conflict, on the other hand, remains much as before 9/11. Those who study traditional or emergent conflict resolution processes that do not directly implicate the state, may find themselves able to continue doing so freely. Occasionally states attempt to co-opt what are reported to be indigenous conflict resolution councils or procedures and where this occurs, it may become useful for anthropologists of conflict to look across the aisle at the critical anthropology of security which more effectively integrates the state as an important element or elements within the study of conflict. The risk with such potentially productive theoretical borrowings is that some of the underlying assumptions about the nature of power, partly inherited from Foucault, seem to emphasize coercion and force. This may often be the case, but it remains somewhat troubling when a specific theoretical position posits that power is coercive and forceful which the observed data then dutifully confirms. It may be useful to fundamentally re-think the theoretical tools for both the anthropology of conflict and the anthropology of security as the Manchester School did in the period following World War II. In the 1950s, Gluckman and Turner threw out the old rule book of *how* to study society and *how* societies operated. This reinvigorated the study not only of conflict, but also of social organization and culture. Developing theoretical and methodological toolkits that are fit for in depth, ethnographic data production in or about conflict zones appears to be one of the more daunting challenges confronting the anthropology of conflict and security, both of which fall within the broader scope of political anthropology.

See Also:

Action anthropology; Action research and engaged anthropology; Applied anthropology; Biopolitics; Biopower; Body: individual, social, political; Crime; Customary Law; Ethnic violence; Foucault, Michel; Gender violence; Gluckman, Max; Holism; Law and anthropology; Maine, Henry; Malinowski, Bronislaw; Neoliberalism; Political Anthropology; Political ecology; Post-conflict studies in anthropology; Power, anthropological approaches; Rappaport, R; Security; Sexual conflict theory; Structural functionalism; Terror; Violence and warfare

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